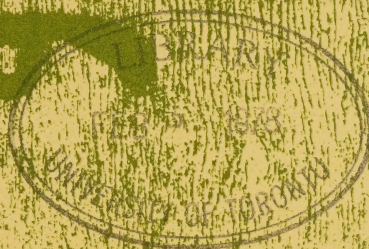


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ABOUT FACE

TOWARDS A POSITIVE
IMAGE OF WOMEN IN
TEXTBOOKS

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TOWARDS A MORE
POSITIVE IMAGE OF
WOMEN IN TEXTBOOKS

Ontario Status of Women Council
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TOWARDS A POSITIVE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN TEXTBOOKS

These guidelines were based on a survey of Ontario textbooks K-6 recommended in Circular 14, and are meant to assist teachers, publishers, and community groups in their efforts to improve the image of women in textbooks and in the classroom.

Women have been included in textbooks in the past but textbooks have not reflected reality: the reality that women are fifty percent of the world's population and that they perform a variety of roles outside the home as well as within it. If numerical balance were our only concern, correcting the image of women in textbooks would be a relatively simple matter. What concerns us more however, is improving the image of women in textbooks and to do this, one must move away from sexist language and sex-role stereotyping and towards a more humanistic approach.

Sexist language is language which reflects dated societal attitudes toward women relegating them to an inferior or secondary role to men. Sex-role stereotyping reflects the view that there is women's work, and men's work, male personality traits, and female personality traits, female activities, and male activities and never the twain shall meet. We all know today that this is no longer true. Consequently, it is time to include non-stereotyped men and women in textbooks, not only to correct a mistaken image but also to give girls and boys today positive role models so that they can grow into the equalitarian society of the future.

Textbooks are sexist if they omit the historic contributions of women, if they take women less seriously than men by using patronizing language or if they depict women in only stereotyped roles. Omission can only be corrected by supplementary curriculum materials and imaginative teachers. For even the most imaginative and resourceful teacher, the questions remain: Why haven't we noticed these omissions before? If there is nothing in the textbooks, why not? Where can materials about women be found? One's level of awareness is also affected by the books one reads as a child in which women were omitted. Once the pattern of excluding women had begun, perhaps it was too much trouble to dig up their history. But as one of the most important agents in a child's socialization process, you will be motivated to dig, to hunt, to search, and research in your attic, at your local library, women's centre, and the magazines you read for information on women for your class. You may collect enough to teach a course on the History of Women, the Image of Women in Literature, or Women in Science. Your students, if encouraged, will want to do projects on women and you and they together can write for, purchase and find the resources for putting women back into the curriculum.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

ILLUSTRATIONS

Studies have shown that seventy-five percent of all textbook illustrations exclude women entirely and when they are shown, they are drawn significantly smaller and in the background performing stereotyped activities such as cooking, cleaning, or passively standing by watching male activity.

While Canadian women are a majority of the country's population, their history has been similar to that of a minority group such as Indians, consequently, the same conscious effort must be taken in portraying women as in portraying minority groups.

POSITIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RE: TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Illustrations of groups should include both females and males.
2. Both females and males should be drawn in the foreground as well as the background.
3. Both females and males should be shown engaging in a variety of activities. *Examples:* games, sports, chores, adventures, work.
4. As many children and adults dress relatively the same, differences in costume and colour of outfits need not be stereotyped. *Example:* girls in jeans and slacks.
5. When indoors, not all women need to wear an apron. *Example:* they may wear jeans, shorts, dresses without aprons.
6. Both males and females should be shown indoors and outdoors, in the home and at their places or work, with a wider range of occupational roles. *Example:* a female doctor or lawyer and a male child care worker or telephone operator.
7. Females should be shown in a variety of roles in the home other than serving and kitchen duty. *Examples:* gardening, balancing cheque books, making home repairs.
8. Males should be shown in a variety of roles in the home other than being served, and general handyman. *Example:* washing dishes, laundering, ironing.
9. Girls should be shown with their fathers engaged in interesting activity and boys with their mothers as well as parents and children in non-stereotyped roles. *Examples:* girls and boys with mothers at tool box, boys and girls helping fathers bake.
10. Strict attention should be paid to toys, games, and sports. Girls play with toys other than dolls and boys enjoy a variety of toys other than machinery. *Examples:* girls and boys playing chess or checkers, baseball, tag, swimming.

OCCUPATIONAL ROLES

In the past, a woman had a limited number of roles, usually wife and/or mother. As she went out into the world, her occupational roles were limited — teacher, nurse, and secretary. We all know that mothers do a variety of things such as gardening, balancing cheque books, driving the car, home repairs, and community work. Fathers cook, clean, launder, and iron. We also know that women are doctors, lawyers, veterinarians, engineers, and managers as well as being involved in science, politics, and the arts. Both men and women should be shown sharing child care, household duties, making decisions, participating in sports, working in factories, stores, and offices, serving on boards, making scientific discoveries and practicing medicine and law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women are often relegated to support positions. It is usually easy to equalize their contributions by changing a few words.

Example:

Mr. Totter's work took him to the islands in Beaver lake. There he visited the Indians and worked with them. Mrs. Totter joined him because she was interested in Indian children.

Mothers like to shop in the hardware store too. They always need things for the kitchen.

Possible alternative:

Mr. and Mrs. Totter's work took them to the islands in Beaver lake. There they visited the Indians and worked with them.

Parents like to shop in the hardware store. They always need things for their home.

Women and girls are usually depicted as servants to men and boys. As sharing in fun and chores is the mature approach, a different way of expressing ideas is in order.

Example:

You fell asleep just like a girl. Listen, we're starving. Get us something to eat.

Jill and her mother cleared the table and served Bill and father the apple pie they had baked.

Possible alternative:

Wake up. You must have really been tired to fall asleep at dinner time. We're all hungry. Let's pitch in and fix something to eat.

It was Bill's night to cook dinner. Everyone cleared the table while Bill cut the cake he and his father had baked.

Occupational roles for women have been portrayed as limited to the home or to the service professions outside the home such as librarians or teachers. An imaginative approach would be to include women in all the professions.

Example:

A boy can be a fireman, policeman, farmer, truck driver, or pilot. A girl can be a nurse, hairdresser, or ballet dancer.

Firefighting is a job for men with skill and training.

Possible alternative:

Girls and boys can be mail carriers, pilots, doctors, nurses, hairdressers, dancers or lawyers.

Firefighting is a job for both men and women with skill and training.

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS, ABILITIES, AND SELF-CONCEPT

Women and girls have been shown to be afraid, quiet and easily given to tears, while men and boys have been shown to be brave, strong, and vocal thus these attitudes become a self fulfilling prophecy. We are often told that boys will read only stories about boys but girls will read anything. If girls are shown possessing courage, physical strength and skills, both girls and boys will find them more interesting. Both boys and girls like *Island of the Blue Dolphins*; *Wizard of Oz*; *Harriet the Spy*; and *Pippi Longstockings*.

Females as well as males possess the ability to think logically, explore, and have adventures. Males as well as females can be weak, fearful, troublesome, and inept. Males can be gentle, tender, polite, inactive, or neat. Females can be active, messy, rude, and tough. In reality, such characteristics are shared by males and females; consequently, textbooks that divide them into "masculine" or "feminine" are misrepresenting reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Both boys and girls share a variety of personality characteristics. When one sex is shown consistently in one way, this should be changed and discussed.

Example:

*Girls can't explore as well as boys.
At least, she isn't grumbling at us.*

A mouse, a mouse! said the frightened girl.

*Just how much trouble her curiosity
had caused them, they did not find
out until later.*

*Panic seized her again and she began
to tremble.*

*I'm sorry I got lost and caused you
so much trouble, she said.*

Possible alternative:

*Not all boys and girls like exploring
but they can help in other ways.*

*A mouse, a mouse! said the frightened
child.*

*Just how much trouble their curiosity
had caused them, they did not find
out until later.*

*Panic seized them again and they
began to tremble.*

*I'm sorry I got lost and caused you so
much trouble, he said.*

Titles of books, stories and courses and cliches are often sexist in nature and can easily be changed to include both sexes.

Example:

Boys will be boys.

The pig-headed wife.

Man and his world.

Possible alternative:

Children will be children.

The stubborn couple.

The world and its people.

ACTIVITIES

Girls are passive; boys are active! This characterization has been the role in textbooks but as any of us know who have watched healthy children, both boys and girls have periods of activity and quietness. Most children love games, running, jumping, bike riding, sports, fishing, reading, exploring, and building and creating things. If only boys are encouraged to be active, girls with these inclinations may learn to hide them. If only girls are encouraged to show their emotions, boys may feel shy to express their feelings.

If activities in the textbooks are sex-role stereotyped; if girls are passive, if boys never show their emotions there are a variety of classroom activities that can help children see that fear, and sorrow, courage and happiness, initiative and relaxation are human characteristics.

1. *Plan sports and games in which the sexes are integrated on the school yard.*
2. *Have each child make a short oral presentation about their most adventurous experience.*
3. *“When I feel like crying” could be the topic for another presentation.*
4. *Re-read a specific story with the class substituting a girl’s name for a boy’s name and visa versa.*
5. *In classroom chores, ask the girls and boys to do the heavy work as well as the light chores.*
6. *Make sure the physical education facilities for girls are equal to those for boys. Stress importance of physical fitness for girls and boys equally.*

If, due to existing textbooks, teachers find it necessary to use selections that contain sexist attitudes, these attitudes should be discussed in the classroom or in supplementary material. If this is not done, the reader will get the impression that sexism is socially acceptable.

It is hoped that the guidelines presented here will act not only as consciousness-raisers and bring about positive change in curriculum materials but that they will also act as a creative incentive to the reader to expand on the material here and develop additional guidelines. The future for children of both sexes can be bright if the world into which they grow is conscious of the inequities and is trying to act affirmatively. It's up to you.

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